United Nations E/CN.6/2015/NGO/231

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 January 2015

English
Original: French

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Jesus Weeps over Africa, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-66290 (E) 050215

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Statement

The situation of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has developed significantly during this period – something that can be credited to the recommendations resulting from the Conference.

But before we describe that development, it would be useful to recall the main points of the Beijing Conference and the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted there by consensus.

From 4 to 15 September 1995, more than 30,000 people from 189 countries participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women, the objective of which was action for equality. The main topics covered at the conference included the advancement and self-reliance of women in the contexts of fundamental women's rights, women and poverty, women and decision-making, the girl child, violence against women and other issues of concern.

At the plenary session, a final document containing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted by consensus.

The Declaration reflected the international community's commitment to the advancement of women and the implementation of the Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective was applied to all policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels over the next five years. If implemented, the Platform for Action would give women more power in the social, economic and political spheres, improve their health, facilitate their access to education and protect their reproductive rights.

Subsequently, several States have adopted programmes for the advancement of women. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a Ministry of Gender and Family has been established, as well as a number of associations fighting for equal rights for women. At the national level, there are women's networks such as the Réseau Femme et Développement (Women and Development Network) (REFED), which have branches in the provinces. In Bas-Congo, women have joined together to form cultural, religious and development associations and have clearly become aware of the disadvantaged situation they are in. With the help of State-run advancement programmes, girls are now competing in fields formerly reserved for men, such as aviation, electricity, mechanics and carpentry.

In a statement made in August 2013, the Minister of Gender, Women and Family, Ms. Inagosi, called on women to work hard to participate in the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

She made the appeal at the presentation ceremony for newly appointed women in the justice sector, which she said was a chance to awaken women and to call on them to work hard because advancement was not handed on a plate but earned by merit.

The Minister said that the rise of women was the result of the implementation of the Government's action plan to implement United Nations Security Council resolution 1325.

The impact of the Beijing Conference has been felt beyond the capital Kinshasa, albeit less dramatically. Women are becoming aware of their role in development. There is increasing awareness of the need to train women in order to

give them equal access to information, education and training and power, in order to kick-start a harmonious, comprehensive and integrated development process. Women must enjoy social, economic, political and legal rights and be involved in concrete development efforts.

In Africa, as regards the African Union women have succeeded in claiming an equal share of commissioner posts (there are currently five women commissioners and five men). Following the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have managed to achieve 30-per-cent participation in public and private institutions.

In Bas-Congo, women occupy the posts of Assistant Territorial Administrator in all territories, Deputy Mayor in the towns of Boma and Matadi and Vice-President of the Provincial Assembly. Our NGO, Jeweaf, is chaired by a man and coordinated or steered by a woman.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not generally aware of the role it plays in increasing the tax burden on the civilian population comprising vulnerable groups, such as women, young girls and the elderly. Such people, who are at last seeking to escape from their predicament, once again become vulnerable when hit by such taxation.

Indeed, the budget allocated to the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children is ridiculous and is insufficient to effectively address the issue of equality and to implement the gender equality policy.

Rural women constitute the majority of our population, an estimated 80 per cent. Unfortunately, the Government pays little attention to the situation of such women, who are not recognized even though their status as agricultural employees entitles them to the rights enshrined in the Labour Code.

Farmers use antiquated and outdated agricultural tools, which make their work difficult. As they do not have the resources to abandon the use of such tools, they are unable to improve their living conditions. Women in rural areas are left to their sad fate and live in disadvantaged circumstances caused by a lack of education and information and cultural beliefs that are deeply rooted in an environment shaped by general and religious fundamentalism.

Despite all these strategies, programmes and commitments to international legal instruments, various forms of discrimination against women persist, which the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is steadily working to eliminate.